*SŪRAH 65*

# Al-Ṭalāq
(Divorce)

## Prologue

This *sūrah*, Divorce, is an outline by God of the rules governing divorce, discussing in detail those cases that were not discussed in the other *sūrah* that tackles this important issue, *Sūrah* 2, The Cow. The *sūrah* also deals with a number of other family issues that result from divorce. It specifies the time when divorce may take place if it is to gain God's approval and to follow His law: "*Prophet! When you divorce women, divorce them with a view to their prescribed waiting period.*" (Verse 1) It states the divorced woman's right and duty to stay in her family home, i.e. her divorcing husband's home, during her waiting period. She cannot be turned out and should not leave of her own accord except in situations where a woman has committed an act of gross indecency: "*Do not drive them out of their homes, nor shall they themselves leave, unless they commit a flagrant indecency.*" (Verse 1) It also specifies the woman's right to leave home after the end of her waiting period and her freedom to do what she likes, unless her husband has reinstated the marriage within the waiting period. Should this occur, it should only be to resume normal married life between them. It cannot be done to cause the woman any harm or to deprive her of the chance to marry a different man: "*When they have completed their appointed term, either retain them in fair manner or part with them in fair manner.*" (Verse 2) Whichever

option is followed, retaining the marriage or allowing the break up to be complete, it should be in the presence of witnesses: "*Call to witness two persons of known probity from among yourselves.*" (Verse 2)

In *Sūrah* 2, the waiting period of a woman who has not yet reached the menopause is specified as three cycles, counting either the time of menstruation or the time of cleanliness. The scholarly difference here is based on the linguistic meaning of the term used in the *sūrah*, *qur'*, which applies to either period. In this *sūrah*, the waiting period of a divorced woman who has passed the menopause or who is too young to have a period is specified: "*As for those of your women who are beyond the age of monthly courses, as well as for those who do not have any courses, their waiting period, if you have any doubt, is three months.*" (Verse 4) Likewise, the waiting period of a pregnant divorcee is specified: "*As for those who are with child, their waiting term shall end when they deliver their burden.*" (Verse 4)

The *sūrah* also includes rulings on the home where a divorced woman lives during her waiting period and, if she is pregnant, her right to maintenance until she has delivered the baby: "*Let them dwell wherever you dwell, according to your means, and do not harass them so as to make their lives a misery. If they are with child, maintain them until they have delivered their burden.*" (Verse 6) The *sūrah* then goes on to give detailed rules about the breast-feeding of a divorcee's child and her right to financial compensation if she so breast-feeds the child, if the two parents agree this is in the child's best interests, as also provisions for the child's breast-feeding by another woman if the two cannot agree: "*If, after that, they suckle your infants, pay them for it. Take counsel with one another in a fair manner. If some of you make things difficult, let another woman suckle the child.*" (Verse 6) The *sūrah* then adds further details on maintenance and compensation in all cases, making it commensurate with the financial means of the divorcing husband: "*Let the one who has ample means spend in accordance with his means; and let the one whose provisions are restricted spend according to what God has given him. God does not burden anyone with more than He has given them.*" (Verse 7)

Thus, the *sūrah* takes up all divorce situations. providing detailed legislation for each context. It caters for every problem that results

from the collapse of the family, providing a comfortable solution that combines clarity with care, ease and attention to detail.

**Taking Divorce Seriously**

This *sūrah* is remarkable in the way it tackles divorce and the situations that may result from it. It brings together many aspects of encouragement and warning, and gives comments on every order and ruling. It links the question of divorce to God's will as it works in the heavens and the earth, and to God's law that brings destruction to those who stubbornly disobey Him. By the same token, it also provides comfort and increased provisions to those who remain God-fearing. It repeats its directive to treat the other party with kindness, forbearance and mutual consideration, always preferring to do a good turn. It holds out the prospect of people receiving better results, reminding them of God's will and how it applies to creation, the provision of sustenance, and in cases of ease and affliction.

We can only look with amazement at the numerous universal truths brought together in a *sūrah* that primarily deals with divorce. The theme is taken so seriously that the *sūrah* begins making its address to the Prophet personally, although it is intended as a general address to all believers. The *sūrah* is also remarkable in the way it deals with each situation in great detail, requiring that its provisions and rulings be implemented while maintaining a fear of God. We also note that the comments given are numerous, coupled with promises of reward and warning against punishment. These comments, long and frequent as they are, give the impression that this question is the total sum of Islam. It is the question determined by God who watches how His instructions are put into effect. Those who implement them with a genuine God-fearing sense need fear no harm, while those who procrastinate, evade or try to harm others are threatened with the sternest punishment. It raises the hope of good prospects to the community that deals with such situations in a fair, reasonable and kind manner.

We read in this *sūrah* statements like: "*Be conscious of God, your Lord... These are the bounds set by God. Whoever transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul. You never know; after that, God may bring about some*

*new situation.*" (Verse 1) "*Call to witness two persons of known probity from among yourselves; and do yourselves bear witness before God. Thus is admonished everyone who believes in God and the Last Day. For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect. God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose. God has set a measure for everything.*" (Verses 2–3) "*For everyone who is God-fearing, God makes things easy. Such is God's commandment which He has revealed to you. God will pardon the bad deeds of everyone who is God-fearing and will grant him a richl reward.*" (Verses 4–5) "*After hardship, God will grant ease.*" (Verse 7)

We also read the following stern, long and detailed warning: "*Many a community that insolently defied the commandment of their Lord and His messengers We have brought to account in a severe manner and inflicted on them terrible suffering. Thus they tasted the outcome of their own conduct. Yet the end of their conduct was ruin. God has prepared a severe punishment for them.*" (Verses 8–10) We note how it is followed with a strong caution against doing what leads to such a fate, and a reminder of the great blessing of sending God's Messenger with the light that he brings and with the promise of great reward: "*So, you who are endowed with insight, you who have faith, fear God. God has bestowed on you a reminder from on high. [He has sent you] a Messenger who recites to you God's revelations that make things clear, so that He may lead those who believe and do righteous deeds out of the depths of darkness into the light. God will admit everyone who believes in Him and does righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. God will have granted them a most excellent provision.*" (Verses 10–11) We then read how it is all concluded with a note that opens up the whole universe before us: "*It is God who has created seven heavens and likewise of the earth. His command descends through them all, so that you may learn that God has power over all things, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge.*" (Verse 12)

All this is contained in a comment on the rulings regarding divorce. We also note that a whole *sūrah* of the Qur'ān is devoted to regulating this situation and the consequences that result from it. In this way, we see how divorce is linked to the most fundamental and essential facts of faith, both at the level of the universe and the level of the human soul,

even though divorce is a situation of ruin, not building, a severance, not initiation, and its subject matter is a family, not a state. Yet the *sūrah* gives us the impression that it is more serious than establishing a state.

What does all this signify? Its significance is varied, but in its totality it points to the sublime nature of this religion, its seriousness and its divine origin. This is clear even though nothing else points to it other than this *sūrah*. Hence, we see how the Islamic system approaches the family question with much seriousness. Islam is a system based on the family. The family home is a shelter that gives comfort. People live there nurturing ties of love, affection, mutual sympathy and care while observing values that maintain purity and the absence of lewdness. Within the family home children are reared and looked after.

> Relations within the family are shown in an atmosphere of clarity that radiates with mutual sympathy and genuine care: "*And among His signs is that He creates for you spouses out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you.*" (30: 21) "*They are as a garment for you, as you are for them.*" (2: 187) Marriage, then, is a bond between two souls, based on mutual inclination, love and tenderness. It establishes a unit within which relations reflect mutual care and kindness. The very words the Qur'ān uses in reference to the family generate an air of ease and tenderness as they express the type of bond Islam wants to see within this unit, recognizing its noble objectives of helping life to continue through procreation. Therefore, these objectives are shown to be clean, pure and serious. It describes them very aptly in the following way: "*Your wives are your tilth.*" (2: 223) This description also implies fertility and increase in numbers.
>
> In keeping with its total approach to all aspects, Islam provides this homely unit with all its care and warrantees. It does not limit itself to spiritual inspiration, but also adds legal provisions and guarantees.[1]

1. Sayyid Quṭb (1982), *Al-Salām al-'Ālamī wal-Islam*, (Islam and World Peace), Beirut and Cairo, pp. 67–68.

When we look at Islamic family legislation in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* regarding all situations, and consider the directives accompanying the legal provisions, as well as the different influences brought to bear, and the fact that the whole question is given a direct link to God at every step, as is the case in this *sūrah* and in others, we then realize how important an institution the family is in the Islamic system. We appreciate the value God assigns to the question of the family when we remember that in the opening verse of *Sūrah* 4, Women, God states in the same sentence the requirement of fearing Him and being mindful of family ties: "*Mankind, fear your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad so many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your ties of kinship. Indeed, God is ever watching over you.*" (4: 1) He also combines worshipping God alone with kindness to parents: "*Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents.*" (17: 23) In another *sūrah*, gratitude to God is coupled with gratitude to one's parents: "*Be grateful to Me and to your parents.*" (31: 14)

That we should take such great care is consistent with God's will that has established human life on the basis of the family. He willed that the first unit in human existence was a family made of Adam and his wife. All mankind is the progeny of this first family unit. God could have created millions of human individuals at the same time, but He chose to let all humanity begin with a single unit because He wished to give the family a momentous role in human life. Family life meets the requirements of human nature and allows human abilities and character to develop. It also nurtures the child's talents and strengthens his potential. The most profound influences on man are seen within the family. Therefore, the Islamic system, which represents the final and complete divine code for human life, fits perfectly with God's will that brought man into existence. Such harmony is observed in everything that comes from God.

The second message that the *sūrah*'s serious approach to marital and family matters delivers is how the Islamic system wishes to elevate these human ties to a sacred level that sees them linked to God. In essence,

they are made a means for spiritual purification. This contrasts with the way they have been viewed in idolatrous beliefs and in distorted religion that has moved far away from dealing with human nature.

> Islam neither suppresses natural feelings nor considers them dirty. It only regulates, purifies and elevates them above the physical level so that they become central to many psychological and social values. By contrast, adultery, and prostitution in particular, removes from such natural desires all the exquisite feelings, attractions and values that have been refined over the long history of human life. It leaves such desires naked, dirty and coarser than in animals. In many animal and bird species, couples live together in a regulated life. They do not have the sort of sexual chaos that adultery spreads in some human communities, particularly where prostitution is rife.[2]

Islam considers marriage a means to maintain one's purity. It calls on the Muslim community to facilitate the marriage of men and women, should money become an obstacle to marriage: "*Marry the single from among you as well as such of your male and female slaves as are virtuous. If they are poor, God will grant them sufficiency out of His bounty. God is Munificent, All-Knowing. As for those who are unable to marry, let them live in continence until God grants them sufficiency out of His bounty.*" (24: 32–33) It calls marriage *iḥṣān*, which means protection. Thus, believers develop the concept that staying without protection, even for a short period, does not earn God's favour. ʿAlī explained the reason for his marriage shortly after the death of his first wife, Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter thus: "I feared to meet God when I was without a wife." Marriage is, then, one of the acts of obedience to God, and by which a believer hopes to improve his position with God. The marital tie becomes to him a sacred one since it is part of obeying God.

2. Sayyid Qutb (2006), *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, Vol. XII, p. 269.

## A Realistic Approach to Marriage

This *sūrah* and similar ones like it indicate the realistic nature of the Islamic approach to life and to human nature. It accepts human nature as it is and works upon its potentials and circumstances. Therefore, it does not stop at either providing detailed legislation on a matter that is left to people's consciences or issuing directives. Instead, it uses both in its approach to the human soul and to practical life.

To start with, the marriage bond is meant to be permanent and well established. Islam adds a host of guarantees to ensure that it remains so, raising it to the level of fulfilling God's orders. It enables state funds to be used to help poor men and women marry. It legislates for the observance of values that prevent exposing physical charms so as to tempt the other sex, this so that desires are settled within a proper and legitimate framework. It prescribes punishments for adultery and false accusations of adultery. It protects the sanctity of homes by requiring people to ask permission before entering, and defines that people inside the home should ask permission before entering other rooms. Islam also regulates marital ties with specific rules and laws. It establishes the family system on the basis that one of the two partners is responsible for taking full care of the family, the man, as he is better suited for this responsibility. In this way, Islam prevents conflict and disorder within the family. Further safeguards are put in place to work together with directives utilizing people's emotions. It adds to all this the fact that this bond and its preservation are an essential aspect of being God-fearing.

Yet practical human life shows that there are situations that end in ruin, despite all the guarantees and safeguards. These must be faced in a practical way. Denial is of no use when the continuity of marital life becomes almost impossible. To hold on to marriage in such cases serves no purpose.

> Islam does not rush to enforce a break-up of the marriage once conflict erupts. On the contrary, it tries hard to hold on to it, allowing it to break only when there is no other way.
>
> Islam addresses men: "*Consort with them in a goodly manner. Even if you are averse to them, it may well be that you are averse to something*

*in which God has placed much good.*" (4: 19) Thus it encourages them to take things easy and to persevere, even when they are averse to their wives. It opens up a window for them as regards something they may not know: "*It may well be that you are averse to something in which God has placed much good.*" These women to whom they are averse may bring them much good, which they are unaware of. If God has this good in store for them, they must not let it go to waste. Nothing is more effective in working on emotions so as to control feelings of hate and moderate them.

Should the matter go beyond feelings of like or dislike and reach a point of incompatibility and irreconcilability, Islam does not rush to recommend divorce. Rather, it recommends an attempt by well-wishers to achieve reconciliation: "*If you have reason to fear that a breach may occur between a (married) couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people. If they both want to set things aright, God will bring about their reconciliation. God is indeed All-Knowing, aware of all things.*" (4: 35) "*If a woman has reason to fear ill-treament or desertion by her husband, it shall not be wrong for the two of them if they should try to set things peacefully to rights between them; for peace is best.*" (4: 128)

If all such intermediation fails, and there appear to be things that prevent a tolerably peaceful life, then the split is serious. To retain the marriage in such circumstances would inevitably lead to failure. The pressures involved would compound the already adverse effects on the people involved. Hence, it is wise to accept the facts and put an end to the marriage. Islam in no way likes this, but views it as necessary. We should always remember that of all lawful things, God dislikes divorce most.[3]

Even if the man wants to divorce his wife, this is not instantaneously possible. The proper thing is for divorce to take place when the woman is not in her monthly period, and provided that no sexual intercourse had taken place between the couple. This means that a delay takes

3. Sayyid Quṭb (1982), *Al-Salām al-ʿĀlamī wal-Islam*, (Islam and World Peace), Beirut and Cairo, pp. 84–85.

place, which could overcome the anger and provide an opportunity for the couple to review their situation. In this way, they may reflect and be more inclined to make peace. Divorce may then not take place as a result of this initial delay.

Moreover, there is the waiting period: three monthly cycles, or three months in the case of a divorced woman who has passed the menopause or until childbirth if the woman is pregnant. During this waiting period, the reinstatement of the marriage is possible if a change of heart takes place and the couple want to resume their married life.

Yet all these attempts do not negate the fact that a total split may occur and that there are situations that need to be practically regulated. Islam addresses these situations putting in place legislation to take care of all the aspects involved. Hence, we have the detailed provisions included in this *sūrah*, which show the practical Islamic approach to life's problems in a way that ensures progress and maintains purity.

## Eradicating Traces of *Jāhiliyyah*

This *sūrah* with all that it includes of encouragement, warnings, emphasis, detailed provisions and telling comments clearly indicates that it was addressing certain situations that continued to carry traces of the days of ignorance, marked by the ill-treatment of women and gross injustice towards them. Hence, strong influences are brought to bear on people's minds together with detailed provisions to close any loopholes that may allow evasion of the rules and a return to the old ignorant concepts that led to unhealthy marital relations.

This did not apply to Arabia only. It was common throughout the world. Women were treated in the same way as slaves, or worse than slaves, in almost all parts of the world. In some communities, sex was viewed as filthy and women were thought of as evil, tempting men to indulge in such filth. It was from such depths of global ignorance that Islam raised women and marital relations to their high and pure levels, giving women their rightful positions of honour and putting in place safeguards to protect their rights. No little girl would now be the victim of infanticide. Furthermore, when she reached a marriageable age, she could no longer be forced into marriage against her will. Whether virgin

or mature, a woman must give her consent before she can be married. As a wife, a woman has full and protected rights, and she further enjoys the safeguards provided by Islamic law. If divorced, a woman has the rights detailed in this *sūrah* and in *Sūrah* 2, The Cow, as also revealed elsewhere in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*.

At its own initiative, Islam put all these legislative provisions in place. It was not a response to a feeling among women in Arabia or anywhere else in the world that their situation was unsatisfactory, or to a twinge of conscience among men that required fairness to women. There was no association of women in Arabia or anywhere else for that matter demanding reforms; nor were there any female members of any consultative or legislative assembly. Indeed, not a single voice demanded an improvement in women's status. These legal provisions were part of the code made in heaven for implementation on earth, to ensure fairness to all its people. It was God's will to raise human life from the depth of ignorance into which it had sunk, purge marital relations from their shameful status and to give to man and woman, created originally from a single soul, all their human rights that preserve their honour and dignity.

Islam is a noble religion. Only a perverted ignorant will stand in opposition to it. For, no one abandons God's law in preference for human law except through the pressures of desire and a clinging to worldly pleasures.

Having reviewed the subject matter of the *sūrah* in general terms, we will now discuss the provisions it puts in place. When we look at them within the context of the *sūrah*, we find that they reflect life and movement and that they are full of inspiration. This is the difference between looking at such provisions within their Qur'ānic context and studying them in books of Islamic law.

## **Al-Ṭalāq** (Divorce)

سُورَةُ الطَّلَاقِ

*In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَطَلِّقُوهُنَّ
لِعِدَّتِهِنَّ وَأَحْصُوا الْعِدَّةَ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
رَبَّكُمْ ۖ لَا تُخْرِجُوهُنَّ مِن بُيُوتِهِنَّ
وَلَا يَخْرُجْنَ إِلَّا أَن يَأْتِينَ بِفَاحِشَةٍ
مُّبَيِّنَةٍ ۚ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ ۚ وَمَن يَتَعَدَّ
حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ ۚ لَا تَدْرِي
لَعَلَّ اللَّهَ يُحْدِثُ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ أَمْرًا ﴿١﴾

Prophet! When you[4] divorce women, divorce them with a view to their prescribed waiting period, and reckon the period accurately. Be conscious of God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes, nor shall they themselves leave, unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the bounds set by God. Whoever transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul. You never know; after that, God may bring about some new situation. (1)

فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ
أَوْ فَارِقُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَأَشْهِدُوا ذَوَيْ
عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ وَأَقِيمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ لِلَّهِ ۚ
ذَٰلِكُمْ يُوعَظُ بِهِ مَن كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ
بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ وَمَن يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ
يَجْعَل لَّهُ مَخْرَجًا ﴿٢﴾

When they have completed their appointed term, either retain them in fair manner or part with them in fair manner. Call to witness two persons of known probity from among yourselves; and do yourselves bear witness before God. Thus is admonished everyone who believes in God and the Last Day. For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, (2)

4. The plural form is used here indicating that the address is to the Muslim community as a whole.

وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ
عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَالِغُ أَمْرِهِ ۚ
قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا ﴿٣﴾

and will provide for him whence he does not expect. God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose. God has set a measure for everything. (3)

وَاللَّائِي يَئِسْنَ مِنَ الْمَحِيضِ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ
إِنِ ارْتَبْتُمْ فَعِدَّتُهُنَّ ثَلَاثَةُ أَشْهُرٍ
وَاللَّائِي لَمْ يَحِضْنَ ۚ وَأُولَاتُ الْأَحْمَالِ
أَجَلُهُنَّ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ
اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا ﴿٤﴾

As for those of your women who are beyond the age of monthly courses, as well as for those who do not have any courses, their waiting period, if you have any doubt, is three months. As for those who are with child, their waiting term shall end when they deliver their burden. For everyone who is God-fearing, God makes things easy. (4)

ذَٰلِكَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ أَنْزَلَهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ
يُكَفِّرْ عَنْهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِ وَيُعْظِمْ لَهُ أَجْرًا ﴿٥﴾

Such is God's commandment which He has revealed to you. God will pardon the bad deeds of everyone who is God-fearing and will grant him a rich reward. (5)

أَسْكِنُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ سَكَنْتُمْ مِنْ وُجْدِكُمْ
وَلَا تُضَارُّوهُنَّ لِتُضَيِّقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ ۚ وَإِنْ كُنَّ
أُولَاتِ حَمْلٍ فَأَنْفِقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَضَعْنَ
حَمْلَهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَرْضَعْنَ لَكُمْ فَآتُوهُنَّ

Let them dwell wherever you dwell, according to your means, and do not harass them so as to make their lives a misery. If they are with child, maintain them until they have delivered their burden. If, after that, they suckle your infants, pay them for it.

أُجُورَهُنَّ وَأْتَمِرُوا بَيْنَكُم بِمَعْرُوفٍ ۖ وَإِن
تَعَاسَرْتُمْ فَسَتُرْضِعُ لَهُ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

Take counsel with one another in a fair manner. If some of you make things difficult, let another woman suckle the child. (6)

لِيُنفِقْ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ ۖ وَمَن
قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ ۚ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا ۚ
سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا ﴿٧﴾

Let the one who has ample means spend in accordance with his means; and let the one whose provisions are restricted spend according to what God has given him. God does not burden anyone with more than He has given them. After hardship, God will grant ease. (7)

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن قَرْيَةٍ عَتَتْ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهَا
وَرُسُلِهِ فَحَاسَبْنَاهَا حِسَابًا شَدِيدًا
وَعَذَّبْنَاهَا عَذَابًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٨﴾

Many a community that insolently defied the commandment of their Lord and His messengers We have brought to account in a severe manner and inflicted on them terrible suffering. (8)

فَذَاقَتْ وَبَالَ أَمْرِهَا وَكَانَ عَاقِبَةُ
أَمْرِهَا خُسْرًا ﴿٩﴾

Thus they tasted the outcome of their own conduct. Yet the end of their conduct was ruin. (9)

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا ۖ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۚ قَدْ أَنزَلَ
اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا ﴿١٠﴾

God has prepared a severe punishment for them. So, you who are endowed with insight, you who have faith, fear God. God has bestowed on you a reminder from on high. (10)

رَّسُولًا يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَٰتٍ
لِّيُخْرِجَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ ۚ وَمَن يُؤْمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ
وَيَعْمَلْ صَٰلِحًا يُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن
تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۖ قَدْ
أَحْسَنَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُۥ رِزْقًا ﴿١١﴾

[He has sent you] a Messenger who recites to you God's revelations that make things clear, so that He may lead those who believe and do righteous deeds out of the depths of darkness into the light. God will admit everyone who believes in Him and does righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. God will have granted them a most excellent provision. (11)

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٍ وَمِنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ
مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ ٱلْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ
ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۙ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدْ
أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿١٢﴾

It is God who has created seven heavens and likewise of the earth. His command descends through them all, so that you may learn that God has power over all things, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge. (12)

**The Process of Divorce**

> *Prophet! When you divorce women, divorce them with a view to their prescribed waiting period, and reckon the period accurately. Be conscious of God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes, nor shall they themselves leave, unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the bounds set by God. Whoever transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul. You never know; after that, God may bring about some new situation.* (Verse 1)

This is the first stage and the first rule. It is addressed in the first instance to the Prophet, but it is soon realized that it is a general rule

applicable to every Muslim, not to the Prophet in isolation. In the sentence starting with, '*when you divorce women*', the pronoun 'you' is used in the plural form throughout. This stylistic form is employed to alert attention and imply the seriousness of the matter under discussion. God addresses it to the Prophet in person, giving him His instructions and directives, so that he will, in turn, deliver it to those who follow him. The psychological impact achieved in this way is both strong and clear.

"*When you divorce women, divorce them with a view to their prescribed waiting period.*" (Verse 1) An authentic *ḥadīth* related by al-Bukhārī explains this directive: "'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar divorced his wife when she was in the midst of her menstrual period. 'Umar mentioned this to the Prophet who was clearly angry. He said to 'Umar: 'Tell him to take her back and keep her until she has finished her period, then through her cleanliness cycle and her next menstrual period. When she is clean again if he still wants to divorce her, he should do so before he has intercourse with her. This is when the waiting period which God has ordained starts." Muslim also relates this *ḥadīth* but the last sentence in his version runs as follows: "This is the start of the waiting period which God ordered that women should be divorced with a view to."

It is clear, then, that there is a time when the divorce process can rightly start. A man cannot divorce his wife at any time; he can only do so when his wife is in a period of cleanliness from menstruation during which they have had no sexual intercourse. Other statements indicate that there is another time when the divorce process can be started, which is if the woman is clearly pregnant. The purpose behind limiting the time to these two situations is to delay the divorce for a while after the man has decided to so separate from his wife. During this time, tension may subside if it is of a transitory type and the couple may resume a normal life together. On the other hand, it also ensures that the woman is not pregnant before they embark on divorce. After all, a man may be inclined not to divorce his wife when he learns that she is pregnant. If he still resorts to divorce when he has become aware of her pregnancy, this means that his mind is made up. To sum up, the condition that the wife should be in cleanliness from menstruation without any intervening sexual intercourse is so as to ensure that she is

not pregnant, and the condition that the pregnancy should be clearly determined is to ensure that the man is aware of it. This, then, is the first attempt to deal with cracks in the family structure, and to stop the axe that seeks to destroy it.[5]

Yet this does not mean that divorce does not occur except in these two periods; it occurs whenever it is pronounced,[6] but it will be frowned upon by God, and it will incur the anger of God's Messenger. This is sufficient for a good believer to hold on and not to pronounce the word of divorce until the appropriate time, leaving the matter to God to determine its outcome as He pleases.

"*And reckon the period accurately.*" This is important, so that the waiting period is not made too long as to harm the divorcee, preventing her from remarriage after her waiting period is over. On the other hand, the first purpose of making sure that she is not pregnant will not be properly fulfilled if the waiting period is cut short. Moreover, this directive implies the seriousness of the matter and that God watches us and requires those involved to be careful at every step.

"*Be conscious of God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes, nor shall they themselves leave, unless they commit a flagrant indecency.*" (Verse 1) This is the first caution that follows the address. It is given by God to emphasize the need to maintain fear of Him in all situations. This caution is stated before the order not to turn divorced women out of their homes. Although these are their husbands' homes, they are called here 'their homes' so as to emphasize the woman's right to stay there during the waiting period. Women must not be driven out of these homes; nor should they leave of their own accord, except in a situation where a divorcing woman commits a flagrant indecency. Reports suggest that such an indecency might entail adultery and the need for the woman

5. Some readers may wonder about the woman's right to initiate a termination of the marriage. Islam legislates separately for this situation. Verse 229 of *Sūrah* 2 includes a provision for it, and the *Sunnah* provides more details. Such termination at the wife's request is called *khul'* in Islamic law. Hence, the provisions related to divorce are related to the husband, because he is the one required to take care of all complications resulting from divorce. – Editor's note.

6. This is the view of the majority of scholars, but a minority hold that it does not occur unless it takes place in one of these two periods only.

to receive her punishment, or it might entail her causing harm to her husband's family, or rebellion against her husband and doing what harms him, even though he is a divorcing husband. The purpose of the woman staying in her husband's home is to allow every chance for reconciliation and the reawakening of tender feelings and memories of shared things between the couple. This situation means that the couple will be apart because of the divorce that has been set in process, yet they are close physically. Should she sink so low that she commits adultery, or should she cause harm to her husband's family or rebel against him, this leaves no room for the reawakening of compassionate feelings. Nor is there any need for her to stay with her husband any longer. In fact, their proximity would only deepen the break, rather than heal it.

"*These are the bounds set by God. Whoever transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul.*" (Verse 1) This is the second warning. It is God who watches the implementation of this rule. Would any believer deliberately contravene the bounds God sets in place? To do so would be to bring ruin to those involved. "*Whoever transgresses God's bounds wrongs his own soul.*" He exposes himself to God's anger. He wrongs himself by wronging his wife, when the two are created from a single soul. Thus any wrong that befalls her rebounds on him also. Besides, "*you never know; after that, God may bring about some new situation.*" (Verse 1) This is an inspiring statement. Who knows how God's order to divorced woman to observe a waiting period during which she stays in her husband's home will work to fulfil His will? This order gives a little hope and kindles a faint light that may yet bring about an immeasurably good result. Things may change, and conflict may give way to reconciliation and contentment. God's will is always active, changing things and creating new situations. To submit to His will and observe His orders is for the better. Being conscious of Him and always on our guard lest we do what is sinful ensures an abundance of goodness.

People tend to think only of the present moment and the situation they are in with all its circumstances and difficulties. They may not look up to the future, remaining imprisoned within the present moment feeling that it will continue for ever. They feel that what they are going through now will be their permanent lot. This sort of psychological imprisonment can be terribly detrimental. Yet the truth is different,

because God's will always changes things and brings about what people have never thought possible. It opens up hope, bringing ease after hardship. God initiates at any moment situations that might never have been dreamt of.

God wants this truth to be clearly understood by us so that we will continue to look up with hope to what He puts before us. We must always be optimistic, thinking of what He may grant us and what prospects He opens before us. We should always remember that the next moment can bring something beyond our wildest dreams: "*You never know; after that, God may bring about some new situation.*" (Verse 1)

**Fairness in All Situations**

> *When they have completed their appointed term, either retain them in fair manner or part with them in fair manner. Call to witness two persons of known probity from among yourselves; and do yourselves bear witness before God. Thus is admonished everyone who believes in God and the Last Day. For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect. God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose. God has set a measure for everything.* (Verses 2–3)

These two verses deal with the next stage, stating its rulings. Completing the term means the end of the waiting period. While the divorced woman is in her waiting period, whatever its length be, her husband may take her back in marriage and she regains her status as his wife. This is what is referred to in the verse as 'retain them'. Likewise, he may allow the waiting period to reach its specified end when his divorced wife will part with him and she cannot be lawful to him again unless they go through a fresh marriage contract, just as if he had taken a new wife. In either situation, the divorcing husband is commanded to behave in fairness. He is prohibited from retaining her so as to harm her. A man may retain his divorced wife shortly before the end of her waiting period then divorce her a second and a third time to prevent her from marrying someone else. He may also retain her to leave her, as it were, in a state of suspense, and so put further pressure on her causing her to offer to forgo

her rights in order to gain her divorce. Both situations were common practice at the time this *sūrah* was revealed. They continue to take place when people deviate from the path of fearing God, which is the most important guarantee of the implementation of His rules governing cases of family relations and break ups. Husbands are also forbidden to harm their divorcees by verbal abuse of any sort. The marriage bond is set in place on the basis of fairness and must end, when it is terminated, in a fair manner, so that the couple retain good feelings towards each other. They may, for all they know, resume life together in the future, and they will not then want to have any painful memory of verbal abuse that may cast a shadow on their new relation. Besides, this is the sort of good manners that Islam wants all its followers to abide by.

In either case of complete parting or reinstatement of the marriage, two witnesses of known probity are required, so that no doubt about the marriage status should remain. People may learn of the divorce, but the reinstatement of the marriage may escape their attention, which may lead to doubts and gossip. Islam wants all marital matters to remain clean and clear, in reality, in people's feelings and in their conversations. According to some scholars, but not others, the reinstatement of the marriage, as well as the full divorce, are completed without witnesses, but some make it a condition for the reinstatement of the marriage only. It is agreed, however, that witnesses are needed after or at the time of complete parting or the reinstatement of the marriage. Both views are expressed.

Having established the ruling, comments and directives follow in succession: "*Do yourselves bear witness before God.*" (Verse 2) The issue is one in which God is concerned, and the witnesses are called in for His sake. It is He who has ruled that witnesses are needed, and He watches how this is done and gives rewards for it. The witnesses are dealing with Him directly, not with either of the divorcing couple or with the general public. "*Thus is admonished everyone who believes in God and the Last Day.*" (Verse 2) These rulings are addressed to people who believe in the Day of Judgement. The *sūrah* tells them this admonition applies to them in particular. If they truly believe in God and the Last Day, they will be admonished. This is the test of their faith. It proves whether their claims to be believers are true or not.

"*For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect.*" (Verses 2–3) He will grant God-fearing people a way out of any tight situation in this present life and in the life to come. He will also give them their provisions from where they neither know nor expect. This is a general statement describing a permanent situation. However, stating it here in the context of the rulings concerning divorce suggests that this is particularly true when people remain God-fearing in dealing with this particular situation. This is when the most important means of control come from within oneself and from one's own conscience. There is much scope for misuse of resources and for the appropriation of what does not rightfully belong to oneself. Only fear of God and a sensitive conscience provide effective restraint.

"*God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose.*" (Verse 3) Again, wicked scheming has wide scope and can take different routes in this relationship. Indeed, trying to avoid wicked scheming by one party may make the other resort to wicked scheming of their own. This statement impresses on people that they should not attempt anything of the sort. Rather, they should place their trust in God; this is sufficient for anyone. God always accomplishes what He wants. Whatever He has willed has already taken place. Therefore, to rely on Him is to rely on the One who is able, powerful and always brings about the results He seeks. It should be noted that this Qur'ānic statement is general and aims to instil into people the right concept with regard to God's will and power. Including it here with the rulings on divorce suggests that it has important significance and effect in this very crucial social matter.

"*God has set a measure for everything.*" (Verse 3) Everything is given its due measure, accomplished at the place, time and with the circumstances set for it. Hence, it is the result of its particular causes and produces its own results. Nothing is the result of blind coincidence, either within man and his life or in the universe at large. This is an important aspect of the Islamic concept.[7] Yet mentioning it here relates it to the rulings God has given concerning divorce, its timing, waiting period and witnesses.

7 We spoke in detail about this truth in our commentary on verse 2, *Sūrah* 25, in Vol. XII, pp. 379–382, and also in commenting on verse 49, *Sūrah* 54, in Vol. XVI.

All these rulings are thus given an extra aspect of being part of God's overall law and give us the feeling that the serious view Islam takes of divorce is part of the seriousness of the system God has established for the universe.

## More on the Waiting Period

> *As for those of your women who are beyond the age of monthly courses, as well as for those who do not have any courses, their waiting period, if you have any doubt, is three months. As for those who are with child, their waiting term shall end when they deliver their burden. For everyone who is God-fearing, God makes things easy. Such is God's commandment which He has revealed to you. God will pardon the bad deeds of everyone who is God-fearing and will grant him a rich reward.* (Verses 4–5)

These verses specify the length of the waiting period for women who do not have a monthly cycle and for pregnant women. It includes women who are past the menopause and those who do not as yet have a menstrual cycle because they have not attained puberty or because of a malfunction in their system. The length of the waiting period for women generally is determined in verse 228, *Sūrah* 2, as three menstrual periods or three periods of cleanliness from menses. Hence, there remained the question of how long a woman who does not have a monthly cycle should wait. This verse removes all doubt, setting the waiting period for such women at three months. Pregnant women wait until they have delivered their child, regardless of whether this provides a short or a long waiting period. Once a woman has given birth, it is absolutely certain that she is not pregnant. Hence, there is no need for her to have any extended waiting period. If such a woman is divorced, her divorce is complete once she has given birth. The process of her divorce is completed and the marriage cannot be reinstated without a fresh marriage contract. God has set a measure for everything, and every ruling of His has its wise purpose.

This ruling is followed by inspiring comments: "*For everyone who is God-fearing, God makes things easy.*" (Verse 4) Ease is the ultimate

blessing that anyone hopes for. When God bestows this great favour on His servants, making things easy for them so that they encounter neither difficulty nor hardship, they will approach matters gently, achieve what they desire easily through their endeavours and happily accept the outcome. Thus they live in ease and comfort until they are due to meet their Lord. Do we see here a temptation for people to approach divorce with ease and in return their life will generally become easy?

"*Such is God's commandment which He has revealed to you.*" (Verse 5) This is a totally different touch, alerting us to the source of the order. It is given by God to those who believe in Him. To obey the order is to make the belief and the bond with God a practical reality. Then we have further emphasis on the need to remain always God-fearing, particularly in connection with what people may do in cases of divorce: "*God will pardon the bad deeds of everyone who is God-fearing and will grant him a rich reward.*" (Verse 5) The first reward is to make things easy for us, and the second is to forgive us our sins and to increase our reward for good deeds. It is a very generous and exciting offer, yet it is made in the form of a general statement and a promise that applies to all. However, it imparts a particular colour to the question of divorce and gives us a reminder of God's great bounty. Why would anyone, then, make things hard and complicated when God promises such a great reward for making things easy?

### Maintenance and Breast-Feeding

> *Let them dwell wherever you dwell, according to your means, and do not harass them so as to make their lives a misery. If they are with child, maintain them until they have delivered their burden. If, after that, they suckle your infants, pay them for it. Take counsel with one another in a fair manner. If some of you make things difficult, let another woman suckle the child. Let the one who has ample means spend in accordance with his means; and let the one whose provisions are restricted spend according to what God has given him. God does not burden anyone with more than He has given them. After hardship, God will grant ease.* (Verses 6–7)

These verses state the final provisions concerning the issue of a divorcee staying in her home, which is the home she has shared with her husband, and her maintenance during the waiting period, whatever its length be. Husbands are commanded to provide them with a dwelling of the standard they can afford. They cannot give them an inferior home to their own or to what they can afford. They must not intentionally try to harass them by giving them a sub-standard dwelling place or by ill-treating them. Pregnant women are given special mention with regard to maintenance – which is due by right to every divorced woman – because the extra length of her waiting period may lead some people to think that maintenance is due for only a part of the waiting period, or that it may go further than the waiting period should it be very short. Hence, clarification is needed, requiring the maintenance to be paid until the end of the waiting period.

Breast-feeding of the child is also discussed in detail. It is not made a duty of the mother that gives her no return. As long as she continues to breast-feed the child, which belongs to them both, she is entitled to receive some wages to help her with life's necessities and to ensure that her milk continues to flow for the benefit of the child. We see how Islamic law takes care of every aspect of the mother's needs. At the same time, both parents are commanded to consult with each other in a fair manner concerning their child, ensuring what is best for it. The child is a trust given to both of them. Their failure to maintain their relation as sound and healthy should not be made to rebound on their child.

Such is the easy approach that God calls on them both to pursue. Should they take a hardened attitude and be unwilling or unable to agree on the child's breast-feeding and the compensation due for it, the child's rights are guaranteed: "*If some of you make things difficult, let another woman suckle the child.*" (Verse 6) The mother must not object to such an arrangement in a way that jeopardizes the child's right to breast-feeding. This arrangement is resorted to only because she and the child's father take a hard attitude and cannot agree on suitable arrangements.

Further details are then given concerning the level of maintenance, which should ensure ease, fairness and cooperation. The man must be fair and the woman must not be unreasonable: "*Let the one who has ample means spend in accordance with his means; and let the one whose provisions*

*are restricted spend according to what God has given him.*" (Verse 7) The person to whom God has given in plenty should be generous in what he gives to his divorced wife in respect of her housing, maintenance and compensation for breast-feeding their child. The one who has limited provisions is not to be blamed for giving according to his means. God does not require anyone to spend above their means. It is He who gives us what we have. No one can have anything other than what God has given him, because there is no other source from which people may take anything. His is the only treasure on which all creatures depend: "*God does not burden anyone with more than He has given them.*" (Verse 7)

Then follows a gentle touch that is bound to please and open a window of hope for both parties: "*After hardship, God will grant ease.*" (Verse 7) It is through God alone that hardship is followed by ease and generous provisions are given after means have been restricted. It behoves both parties then to pin their hopes on Him alone, watching Him in their dealings with each other and maintaining an attitude based on fearing Him in all their affairs. It is to Him that they look up with hope, and it is He who provides comfort and ease after difficulty and hardship.

## A Holistic Approach to Divorce

By this point, the *sūrah* has completed its discussion of all rulings concerning divorce and its effect on the family. It has dealt with all consequences, providing a clear provision for each. The split in the family home thus leaves neither ruins nor dust that settles over hearts and souls. No problem is left unsolved. The split family is not left in lingering turmoil.

Thus the *sūrah* deals with all thoughts and fears that may occur. The husband is assured that he will not suffer poverty or loss of fortune if he provides his divorcee with a good home and proper maintenance, or gives generous compensation for the breast-feeding of his child. The same fears are removed from the woman's mind so that she is not worried about a life of poverty. Likewise, she must not entertain thoughts of receiving an unfair share of her ex-husband's money. Both are assured that a God-fearing approach will see them in ease after hardship, comfort after difficulty and provisions that come from where they do not expect.

What is more is that God will grant such God-fearing people ample reward in the life to come. It is a promise that will see their sins wiped out and their reward multiplied.

The *sūrah* also deals with the after-effects of the dispute that has led to the divorce. There may be lingering feelings of resentment, anger and bitterness. All these are cleared with a gentle, comforting touch and replaced with hope in God's mercy. The *sūrah* here taps feelings of fairness and compassion, relying on the God-fearing value it implants in people's hearts and the desire to win His pleasure.

This holistic approach and its inspiring touches, together with confirmed and repeated assurances, provide the only guarantees to implement these legal provisions Islam puts in place. The only control is that brought about by a sensitive conscience and a God-fearing heart. Each of the divorcing couple can cause the other no end of heartache and problems if they have nothing to limit their area of manoeuvre other than the limits of the law. Some of the Qur'ānic commandments given in the *sūrah* are so flexible as to address all aspects of this whole area. Take, for example, the order: "*Do not harass them.*" (Verse 6) This prohibits all aspects of harassment which no legal provision, however wide in scope, can incorporate. Its implementation is attached to conscience which is profoundly influenced by the approach the *sūrah* takes and to the enhanced God-fearing sense it instils in both parties. They realize that God is aware even of their innermost thoughts. His knowledge encompasses all. Besides, they will hope to receive the compensation He grants to His God-fearing servants in both this life and in the life to come, particularly in relation to provisions and livelihood. This message is repeated in different ways in the *sūrah* because it has a telling effect in easing the hardship that divorce generates and softens the attitudes of both parties.

When they bear all these rulings and directives in mind, a divorcing couple retain on parting some seeds of their old mutual affection and cordial feeling which may yet send up new shoots. In all these rulings and provisions we see the high moral standard that Islam wants to impart to the life of the Muslim community.

**The Fate of the Disobedient**

When the *sūrah* has completed all this, it provides the ultimate lesson referring to the fates of those communities that defied God's commandments and disobeyed His messengers. They neither listened to admonition, nor responded to calls given them by their prophets. The lessons derived from their fates are thus placed before us, reminding all of the miserable fate that awaits those who do not fear God and who disobey Him. It also reminds people of the grace God bestows on believers, to whom the legislation is addressed:

> *Many a community that insolently defied the commandment of their Lord and His messengers We have brought to account in a severe manner and inflicted on them terrible suffering. Thus they tasted the outcome of their own conduct. Yet the end of their conduct was ruin. God has prepared a severe punishment for them. So, you who are endowed with insight, you who have faith, fear God. God has bestowed on you a reminder from on high. [He has sent you] a Messenger who recites to you God's revelations that make things clear, so that He may lead those who believe and do righteous deeds out of the depths of darkness into the light. God will admit everyone who believes in Him and does righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide for ever. God will have granted them a most excellent provision.* (Verses 8–11)

This is a long warning incorporating detailed scenes and images. It is also a profound reminder of God's grace, represented by faith and the light He grants through it. A further reminder is given of His reward in the life to come, which is the best and most generous of all provisions.

To start with, the punishment God metes out to those who defy His orders and do not respond to His messengers is a law He has set in operation: "*Many a community that insolently defied the commandment of their Lord and His messengers We have brought to account in a severe manner and inflicted on them terrible suffering.*" (Verse 8) The verse mentions more details about the way in which they were brought to

account, highlighting its severity and the terrible suffering inflicted on them. This is followed by the final outcome of their actions: "*Thus they tasted the outcome of their own conduct. Yet the end of their conduct was ruin.*" (Verse 9) The image given of this outcome is delayed to the next verse: "*God has prepared a severe punishment for them.*" (Verse 10) All this serves to make the scene longer and provide details of its steps and stages. This is one of the ways the Qur'ān employs to enhance the effects of the message it wants to give.

We need to reflect a little on this warning. We realize that God brought different communities to account, one at a time, whenever they defied His commandments and disobeyed His messengers. We note that this warning is given here in the context of outlining the rulings on divorce. Thus, a link between divorce and this divine law is established. This suggests that the divorce issue is not merely one of couples and families; it is an issue for the entire Muslim community, which is responsible for implementing God's law. To disobey God in this question, or indeed in other aspects of the divine law, or rather the code of living God has given, is an act of defiance which merits punishment, not only for the individuals who commit such disobedience, but also for the community or the country where such defiance takes place. Such defiance means setting up a life system that differs from what God has legislated. The religion of Islam has been bestowed from on high so that it will be obeyed and implemented in a way that regulates life as a whole. Therefore, defying it, even in the area of an individual's personal affairs, exposes the defiant to what earlier communities suffered of God's punishment.

Those communities tasted the results of their own conduct, and the end to which their actions led was utter ruin, which they suffered in this life, before the final reckoning on the Day of Judgement. Cities, peoples and nations tasted such outcomes when they defied God and refused to adopt the code of living He revealed to them. Today, we witness, as did our predecessors, such an outcome being suffered in the form of corruption, loose morality, poverty, drought, injustice and a life of fear that is devoid of peace and security. We see with our own eyes the truth of this warning.

On top of this, there will be grievous suffering that awaits those who defy God's orders and discard the way of life He has laid down. He,

the most truthful of all, says: "*God has prepared a severe punishment for them.*" (Verse 10)

In Volume XVI, we explained in our discussion of *Sūrah* 61, the Ranks, that Islam aims to create a Muslim community distinguished by its special system. It is, therefore, a collective system that conducts all the life affairs of its community. Hence, the community as a whole is responsible for putting it into practice and enforcing its laws. When the community discards the laws and rulings Islam puts in place, it leaves itself exposed to a fate which it is warned about here, just like it befell earlier defiant communities.

The *sūrah* follows the long warning and its detailed images with an address to believers endowed with insight. They are called upon to remain God-fearing: "*So, you who are endowed with insight, you who have faith, fear God. God has bestowed on you a reminder from on high.*" (Verse 10) The *sūrah* gives life to this reminder embodying it in the Prophet (peace be upon him). Thus, God's Messenger in person is the reminder: "*A Messenger who recites to you God's revelations that make things clear.*" (Verse 11)

Here we have a superb example of the Qur'ānic style giving us a profound and true image and that imparts more than one meaning. It first indicates that this reminder, which has been issued to them by God, has been given to them through the person of God's Messenger. It is as if the reminder was given directly to them. Nothing of it was screened by the Prophet. It also means that God's Messenger, in person, is a reminder. His personality has become an embodiment of this reminder, and his actions are a true translation of the Qur'ān. Thus, indeed, was the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). 'Ā'ishah, his wife, describes him in these words: "His morals and manners were the Qur'ān." The Qur'ān was always in his mind as he faced life, and he himself was the Qur'ān addressing life.

In addition to the blessings of the reminder, and the light and guidance given by God, we also have a promise of admission to heaven where believers will enjoy its everlasting bliss. There is a reminder here making clear that this is the best of all provisions, and that whatever people are given in this present life cannot be compared to it: "*God will have granted them a most excellent provision.*" (Verse 11) It is God who

grants all provisions in the life of this world and in the life to come, but some provisions are better than others. His choice of what is best is the right choice. We see how the point of good provisions is mentioned here again so as to impress on people that the provisions in heaven are immeasurably better than what is provided here. Yet this is in addition to the true promise made earlier of giving good provisions to those who remain God-fearing.

## The Creator of All

The *sūrah*'s concluding note refers to the great universe, thus linking the theme of the *sūrah*, its legislation and directives to God's will, power and knowledge that encompass the entire universe:

> *It is God who has created seven heavens and likewise of the earth. His command descends through them all, so that you may learn that God has power over all things, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge.* (Verse 12)

We do not know to what the term 'seven heavens' really refers, nor are we aware of their sizes and dimensions. Likewise, we do not know what the seven earths are. This earth of ours may be one of them and the others are known to God alone. Yet the term *mithluhunn*, translated here as 'likewise' may not be a reference to number, but to the fact that the earth is made of the same material or qualities as the heavens. Whichever is the case, it is unnecessary to try to apply our own knowledge to Qur'ānic statements of this type. Our knowledge does not extend to everything in the universe so as to enable us to learn what exactly the Qur'ān refers to. To claim such precise knowledge is possible only when man acquires absolutely certain knowledge of the entire universe. While this is impossible, we can still benefit by the Qur'ānic reference to this fact and its psychological effect and its bearing on our understanding of the proper Islamic concept of the universe.

This reference to the creation of the vast universe, "*seven heavens and likewise of the earth,*" is awe inspiring. It presents us with a great image of the Creator's limitless power, the vastness of His kingdom. When

compared to the universe, the entire earth seems a tiny little place. How do we see those living on it, and how do we estimate an event that takes place on it? What value should we give to a little sum of money a man gives his divorced wife in maintenance, or that a woman forgos?

God's command descends in between, or through, these seven heavens and the earth or the seven earths. A part of His command is the sum of these rulings concerning the subject matter of this *sūrah*, i.e. divorce. It is, then, a great issue, even by human standards and our concept of time and place. To defy it is to be in defiance of a command that resounds throughout the heavens and the earths. It is a command that those on high hear of, as do other creatures in the heavens and the earths. Defying it, then, becomes a ghastly offence that no wise believer would even contemplate, and particularly when God's messenger has recited to him God's precise revelations, enlightening him on this matter so as to take him from darkness into light.

This command descends through the heavens and the earth so that it implants in believers' hearts the belief that God has the power to do what He wills. Nothing is beyond Him. He also knows everything throughout His great kingdom. Nothing escapes His knowledge, not even the best guarded secrets of the heart.

This truth is relevant here in two ways: the first is that these rulings on divorce are given by God who knows everything. He has issued them knowing all their situations, circumstances, interests and abilities. Hence, they are better to be followed with diligence, for they are better suited for human life. Secondly, the implementation of these rulings in particular is left to people's consciences. Therefore, realizing the extent of God's knowledge and His awareness of everything, including people's feelings and intentions, ensures that such consciences remain sensitive in an area where nothing is more important than fearing God Almighty.

Thus the *sūrah* concludes on this awe-striking note, which also makes people's minds ready to listen and obey. All praise is due to the Creator of these hearts who knows how to inspire and influence them.